

The Priest
... and ...
The People

ANGELICAN CHURCH OF CANADA
GENERAL SYNOD ARCHIVES

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The
Priest and the People



Sermon preached on the Third
Sunday after Epiphany, January
24th, 1909, in the Church of St.
James the Apostle, Montreal. . .



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Explanatory

Many who heard the sermon here printed requested its publication. The expense of printing and distribution was generously undertaken by several members of the congregation and to them grateful acknowledgement is here made.

When a preacher depends wholly upon the time of delivery for the language of his sermon, it will be readily understood that exact reproduction is a difficult matter. But this sermon has been prepared with such fidelity, both to matter and phraseology, as a fairly good memory would warrant.

The Priest and the People.

"Go, Shew Thyself to the Priest."

S. Matt. viii., 4.

IN the Gospel for this Sunday there is recorded the miracle of healing the leper. The Master had just descended from the Mount, where He had preached His marvelous sermon, when He was met by a poor unfortunate cursed with the loathsome and incurable disease of leprosy. The leper evidently recognized in Jesus the power of healing, for at once he sends forth the cry: "Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean." And the Saviour says: "I will be thou clean." "And immediately his leprosy was cleansed."

But mark now what follows: The Master bids him go and comply with the old ceremonial law. The man is not to return immediately to his friends and relatives in order that they may share in the joy of his recovery. There is no doubt, whatever, about his complete restoration to health. He has the evidence of recovery in the soft white flesh and the rich blood coursing in his veins. May he not dispense with the customary forms? But the Christ, Who came not to destroy the law but to fulfil it, will not interfere with the relations between the priest and the individual. He bids the man go and make his accustomed offerings, receive absolution and a certificate of health, and in every particular conform to the Levitical requirements. In a word, Jesus recognizes and approves the relation between the priest and the soul. Our text, therefore, gives us a subject. *The Relation between the Priest and the People.*

It is a subject upon which I have long wanted to preach to this congregation. But it is not an easy subject, because there will always be a tendency on the part of some to give a personal turn to all that may be said. Whilst no sermon can be wholly impersonal, I would like to preface my considerations with the assurance that it is only in the hope that we may the better understand the reciprocal duties between priest and people, that I am preaching this sermon to-day—"Go, shew thyself to the Priest."

We may as well recognize at once the popular outcry against priestcraft and sacerdotalism. A man says, "I will allow no man to come between God and my soul. I do not need the interference of a priest. I will go directly to my Master for any help I may need," and a lot of other cheap asseverations. The Church of England has a different statement to make. She places the very highest sort of value upon the office and work of the priesthood. And her teaching has been the method of God all down the years.

It has been scoffingly said that the prototype of the Archbishop of Canterbury was a primitive medicine man with a rattle! With equal truth it may be said that the prototype of the Chief Justice of England was a primitive chief with a club! The statement only argues the antiquity of the office. The priesthood is the oldest order in the world. There never was a time when God did not appoint certain persons to stand between Him and the people. And whilst we joyfully recognize that Jesus Christ is our Great High Priest, our only Mediator and Advocate, whilst we solemnly affirm that priests before all others would shrink from assuming such high prerogative, yet we fall back upon the words of our Divine Lord for the commission of the priesthood: "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. Receive

ye the Holy Ghost. Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained." These are solemn, weighty words and seem forever to settle and substantiate the claims of the priesthood.

If you turn to the office for the ordination of priests in your prayer book, you will discover four terms used to designate the relations existing between a priest and his people. A study of them may help us to realize more thoroughly our duties, for I am preaching as much to myself this morning as I am to you.

I. PRIESTS ARE WATCHMEN.

In the proper lesson for this service are these very strong and remarkable words: "I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace day nor night." It is a glowing picture of the work and responsibility of a priest.

See him as he stands there solitary and alone. Outlined against the sky, he is a striking figure. Behind him are the people in the city, in whose interests he watches. Before him is the plain, over which his eye ceaselessly ranges in order that he may detect the approach of any and every enemy and at once give forth the warning. Cut off from the people, separated from his fellow-watchmen, his task is a lonely one. Does it not forcibly tell us of the many ways in which the priest of God must watch alone? There are secret troubles committed to his care that he dare never reveal to his closest friend. Confessions are made to him that he must hide down in the deepest places of his heart where only God can see and sympathize. He must bear upon his life the sorrows and anguishes and sins of his people and he must bear them alone. Only the other day, a friend in this congregation said to me, "I wonder that you

priests don't sometimes go mad with the burdens laid upon you." And yet out of the loneliness we hear a cry that helps and stimulates. "Ye have left me alone, and yet I am not alone for the Father is with me." Christ knew the solitariness of the priesthood. But He also knew the source of strength. It was the continual sense of the Father's presence, the frequent communions with the Unseen God that kept Him strong through all the hours of His loneliness.

And what shall be the secret of the priest's power, but the promise of the Christ, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world?" If it were not for that assurance, how often he would fail! For there are many, many times when he must do battle alone, "and of the people there are none with him." There are dangers which threaten and he alone realizes them; there are grievous sins rampant and he alone has the courage to speak out. My friends, there is a lonely watchman upon the walls of this city just now who is crying out his warning as he sees the giantess of impurity stretching forth her filthy, slimy hands and laying them upon some of our homes, and it is surely the people's duty to hear that cry and heed it.

But the watchman is not only alone, he also stands in a position of prominence. All the eyes in the city are upon him. The live-long day his figure marks the sky. There are those who look to him for protection; there are those upon the plain who dread his vigilance and eagerly watch for any moment of relaxation in his duty. His very position invites criticism. Isn't all this true with regard to the spiritual watchman? He is always in the light. Every movement is watched and the slightest dereliction of duty is censured. Ofttimes the priest is inclined to resent the censure and the adverse criticism, but it is all involved in the prominence of his office. There

are souls that wait upon his ministry, there are little ones who follow his example and invest him with heroism, there are enemies who would tempt him from his solemn task. He must be content, he *is* content to bear all that his position invites.

And think too of the responsibility of the watchman. He is not only to guard his own section of the wall, the whole city is his care. If the enemy creeps over his section then every quarter of the city is in danger. He must not fail to blow the trumpet if the cloud of dust on the plain betokens an approaching enemy. Mistakes will be fatal. He must shout "a lion"! the moment an angry beast appears. If he fails in the least particular, the blood of the people will be required at his hands. Oh! the deep, deep responsibility of the priesthood. "They watch for souls as those who must give account." Not the individual parish alone, but the diocese, the whole church is involved in his fidelity. If he falls, the church everywhere suffers and his brethren hang their heads in shame. He must cry out against every threatening foe. Is it intemperance, impurity, false doctrine, heresy, immoral literature—are these the enemies out upon the plain? Then let him give warning unto the people. He "must banish and drive away all strange doctrine," fight against the indifference of the people and in a thousand ways guard the souls of those committed to his care. "And if it shall happen the Church or any member thereof to take any hurt or hindrance by reason of his negligence, ye know the greatness of the fault and also the horrible punishment that will ensue."

These are the things, then, that are involved in the figure of the watchman. The priest is alone, prominent, responsible. Let us turn now and see if there are not duties of the people also suggested.

The people must keep the walls repaired and trans-

act the material business of the city. The watchman must not be expected to come down from his position and concern himself with the broken fortress, the shattered wall, the routine of the city's life. And surely the congregation will free the mind of the parish priest from the burden of financial worry. He will not be expected to busy himself with the material development of the parish. Many a priest has made wreck of his ministry through the harrowing details of parochial organization. Nothing cuts so dreadfully at the spirituality of a priest's work as the ceaseless anxiety over parish debts and church repairs. So let the people repair the wall and keep strong and healthy the affairs in the city.

And then the people must be ready to heed the warning of the watchman. When the trumpet calls, they must stand shoulder to shoulder, prepared to face the enemy. There must be no severing of forces, or disagreements. They must have faith in the priest and believe that his warning is sincere and necessary. They will "go and show themselves to the priest," quick with their answer to his call, ready with strength and sympathy for whatever task, prompt in their heed to his earnest warning. Thus, the watchman and the watched will stand together, the priest and the people will bear loving relation to each other.

II. THE PRIESTS ARE MESSENGERS.

Out from the royal court comes the Ambassador bearing his message from the king to the people. No doubt lingers in his mind as to the truth of the message, no difficulty stays his feet as they hasten forward, no thought of his own worthiness clogs his mind or cripples his speech. The message is all important—it is more than the messenger. Keeness, sincerity, self-forgetfulness—these are the marks of the faith-

ful messenger. I want you now to think with me of the priest in his capacity as a preacher.

These are strange days. In some quarters, the ministry of preaching is depreciated and underestimated. In other quarters, it is overvalued and exaggerated. But I go back again to the original commission and hear the command, "Preach the Gospel." It was no small value that Christ laid upon preaching. And S. Paul solemnly declared—"Woe is me, if I preach not the Gospel." There never was a time when the office of preaching needed greater care and emphasis than to-day. The hour is big with opportunity for the preacher. It is a solemn task for any man to be called to preach nowadays. But if preaching was never more needed than now, so never was it more difficult.

Men have been preaching the same truths for such a long time that originality is difficult, if not actually impossible. And the people seem to demand originality. The temptation is strong to swing away from the old Gospel and invent a new one. It may be said of people to-day as was said of the Athenians of old—they "spend their time in nothing else but either to tell or hear some new thing." The worship of novelty is a very popular form of worship just now. Let a man propound some new theory or preach a little gospel of his own, and people will flock to hear him, and sit with open mouths and attentive ears whilst he prates his new story! Has the old gospel, then, lost its grip upon the hearts of men? Are people really tired of the old truths? My friends, I am not an old man but I have lived long enough to have had my own temptations and to witness the futility and hopelessness of providing a substitute for the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The determination of S. Paul must be the determination of every messenger: "I am determined to know nothing among you save Jesus

Christ and Him crucified." The old truths may be made very fresh and new. Out of the messenger's treasury, things new and old may ever be brought. It matters little about the originality, so long as the preacher is sincere. And the great preachers have left no doubt in our minds about the power of the old Gospel to lift men out of sin into Christ, for they preached the old story simply and sincerely, thinking only of the message and nothing whatever of the messenger.

And another thing that adds to the preacher's difficulty to-day is the crowding of the pulpit. There was a time, before the arrival of the Sunday newspaper, when people would sit on a hot Sunday morning and hear the sermon of an hour's length, but now it must fall inside of twenty minutes and be particularly fine, too, if it is to hold attention! The preacher is obliged to combat forces or compete with rivals of which our grandfathers knew nothing. Books are tremendously increasing, magazines are piling about us and these are usurping the messenger's place and trying to deliver the message.

A thousand acres of forest are cut down every week to provide endless rolls of paper upon which to print the Sunday editions of our papers—and I would rather have the forest! But all these are making the task of the preacher more difficult. Do you understand the agony and battle and temptation, to which every week he is subjected as he tries to be faithful to his Lord and deliver the message whole and unadulterated?

And have the people no duty to the messenger? "Go, show yourselves to the priest" and by your readiness to "hear, mark, learn and inwardly digest" the message, make his labours a little more worth while. Not in any spirit of carping criticism, not thinking more of the form of words than the message

which is struggling through them to your soul, but lovingly, faithfully and sympathetically endeavoring to discover in the poorest sermon some word that will help and cheer and comfort. And in your life, being "living epistles, known and read of all men" and thus strengthening the messenger, who feels thereby that the message has found a home and welcome.

III. THE PRIESTS ARE STEWARDS.

"Stewards of the mysteries of God." "Moreover, it is required in a steward that a man be found faithful." The ancient steward had committed to his care certain gifts and riches for the good of the servants. They were not to be used for his own pleasure or profit. He must rule wisely and well over the household, distributing to each the particular food that was needed. And when his master returned, he must render a faithful account of his stewardship. Do you not see the force and beauty of this figure as applied to the priesthood? Oh! the ineffable mysteries entrusted to the priest of God! Not gold or silver or material food or things perishable, but life, absolution, forgiveness, salvation! 'Tis a tremendously solemn thing to stand before the people with these divine mysteries and to be held accountable for their administration and distribution.

There is the sacrament of Baptism! Go with your tender babes and shew yourselves to the priests, that these children may be washed in the laver of regeneration and grafted into the family of the all-loving Father. Soon again will be sounded the call throughout this parish for those who are ready and desirous to be confirmed. Will you see that the boys and girls are sent to the priests in order that they may be prepared for the Apostolic Rite of laying on of hands?

And there stands the priest before the altar plead-

ing the merits of the Great Sacrifice! How terrible a thing it is that he should call and call and so many refuse to come and take from his trembling hands the Bread of Life! So, too, he holds for the people the grace of absolution! I fear that some of you shrink from the idea that any man has the power of the forgiveness of sins. You are not ready to grant either the necessity or propriety of confession of sins to a priest. Ah! you cannot seriously believe in your church or prayer book, so long as as you hold back from this means of grace. Confession is not any formal, compulsory duty. It is free and voluntary. Many of you have made confession—not perhaps in the cold, traditional way, but in the privacy of your clergyman's library or in the quiet of your own home you have poured out the story of your sin and trouble and have received ghostly counsel and advice and then gone forth to your duty with the sunlight of God's forgiveness shining upon your face. Do not be afraid of terms; try and secure the grace that lies behind all forms.

If the people fully realized the value of these gifts and graces, how much more effectual would the work of the steward be! He is not required to bear these blessings to the people. The sacraments are not to be lifted up and carried about. In the olden times the people went to the priest for whatever comfort and strength they required. In modern days, he must force both himself and the gifts upon the people. My friends, these things ought not so to be. There stands the spiritual steward with both hands full of the mercy of God, with the word of absolution upon his lips ready for the penitent sinner, with a heart all full of love and anxiety for the spiritual good of all—will you not go to the priest and shew him of your trouble and your need, and together you will discover richest treasures out of the storehouse of God?

IV. THE PRIESTS ARE SHEPHERDS.

Most beautiful of all the figures is that of the shepherd! "I am the good shepherd," cries the Lord, "The good shepherd layeth down his life for the sheep." Chief among the qualities of the shepherd is his knowledge of the sheep. "I know My sheep and am known of Mine. My sheep heareth My voice and followeth it, but the voice of the stranger will they not follow."

How then is the shepherd to know his sheep? And there at once occurs the thought of parochial visiting. No priest can do his work well or get to know his people unless he visits them in their homes. But the people must make it possible for him to make genuine pastoral calls. Do you think that is being done when out of five hundred calls, three hundred of them are pasteboard calls? Is it right to ask a priest to spend valuable time in that way? No man but a clergyman would ever humble himself enough to do it. It scarcely comports with the dignity of the priesthood to go about the parish pushing cards through the letter-box slits in the front doors of people's homes! How often he has wanted and tried to meet his people but the conventions of society make it impossible, and years pass before he personally knows many of the church members. Ought not the people to manifest as great a desire to know their priest as the priest continually manifests to know the people? A little mutuality in this respect would help towards the functions of the shepherd.

Then, too, the shepherd must guide the sheep. The old days of driving the flock have happily passed away. It is now the dear privilege of the pastor to lead his flock beside the still waters and into the green pastures. But is the flock willing to be led? Is there not often opposition to being guided? People are

quite willing in all matters relating to the body to be guided by the family doctor. They are ready to follow the lawyer in matters pertaining to the law. They are even attentive to the alderman of their ward as he guides their minds upon civic matters. Ought not at least an equal willingness be shown to follow the lead of the priest in matters relating to the soul? Is it always so? So long as the pastor speaks smooth things and provides agreeable pasturage, the guidance will be recognized. But let him step upon the pet theories of any member of his congregation or attempt to lead him into rough and unpleasant places and instantly there are those who flee away to follow the lead of another shepherd. 'Who gave him authority to dictate and reprimand?' 'Who?' Not man, no earthly power, but Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Thus let the priest in all love and humility guide and govern the flock and let the people in all trustfulness and obedience undertake to follow his leading.

But one thing more remains to be said. The shepherd is to feed his flock. Do you understand what that means? With a congregation of 800 or 1,000 souls, each with his own definite hunger and need, each requiring his own particular food and treatment, how impossible it would seem for a priest to discharge the obligation! And when there are so many services and a multitude of guilds and organizations to superintend, as well as Diocesan committees to serve upon, is it a great wonder that individual cases are sometimes neglected? Will the complaint be long and deep, because at times the food provided is poor and evidently prepared in haste? Ah! dear God, give the people patience and thy priests strength!

And so, my dear friends, I have tried to set forth simply and plainly the relations between the priest and people. I pray you not to misunderstand. We are not pleading for pity or sympathy merely. There

is no joy in the world like unto the joy that comes to the priest of God. And much, very much of the happiness he experiences, springs from the loving hearts and generous sympathy of his people. But it is only possible for a church to grow and prosper, for the word of God to have full effect, when priest and people work together in loving, harmonious relations. To this end it is necessary that they should understand their respective duties, and with confidence in and love towards each other, seek to discharge them faithfully and well. So only can the cause of God be advanced, the name of Christ glorified and the salvation of men set forward!